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ABSTRACT

This article describes the development and design of an elementary masters degree program that focused on literacy teaching and learning. The Master of Education with a Concentration in Literacy program at Western Washington University was designed to be delivered on weekends during the academic year quarters and during the summer. The program taught candidates how to develop literacy-based curricula; understand and apply current literacy assessment and evaluation techniques; design and implement teacher research literacy projects; and understand the social, psychological, and philosophical theories related to literacy and child development. The program emphasized the development of teacher-researchers who could create their own knowledge and understanding of classroom practice. An analysis of teachers' research projects indicated that though they focused on a variety of literacy topics, all could be categorized in terms of learning processes. Surveys of participating teachers examined program strengths and weaknesses and areas for improvement. Overall, teachers were generally satisfied, though they had suggestions for improvement. The teachers liked the weekend format, the overall design, and the cohort model. Four appendixes contain the program evaluation forms. (Contains 16 references.) (SM)

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Masters in Elementary Education
Concentration in Literacy
Program Evaluation

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February 25, 1999

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Western Washington University
Masters in Elementary Education with a Concentration in Literacy
Program Evaluation

Colleges of education today are faced with the challenge of designing master's programs for practicing teachers. Practicing teachers seem to have four central concerns: 1) they want programs that are practical, 2) programs need to fit into their busy lives, 3) programs should provide immediate application to their classrooms, and 4) programs must fulfill their intellectual and affective needs for community and membership in their profession. The purpose of this evaluation is to describe the Master of Education with a Concentration in Literacy program at Western Washington University, which meets the needs and the realities of professional educators' lives. The degree to which the four concerns are met is supported by data from twice-yearly surveys of students. The place and purpose of teacher research, and the strengths and challenges of the program are also discussed.

In accordance with a growing trend across the United States, professors in colleges of education are designing programs to fulfill present-day needs of practicing teachers who want to obtain a master's degree. Burnaford & Hobson (1995) described a field-based master's degree program, where "group process and collaboration are integral parts of both the teachers' learning experiences and the ongoing professional development of faculty who teach in the program" (p. 67). Powell (1997) is a core faculty member in a master's degree program "which gives teachers first hand experiences of creating in the arts, experiences that seem to help teachers validate their own creativity" (p. 1). Both of these programs build on the teachers' interests and the questions they bring with them. Both also approach the graduate students as people first; people with life and professional experiences from which to draw, people with their own questions, and people who are willing to enter into the dynamic of the teaching and learning process as learners themselves. The program that we describe includes those same aspects and, in addition, supports a teacher research component. Teacher research has its roots in action research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Fleischer, 1995; Huberman, 1996; Patterson & Shannon, 1993), educational

ethnography (Heath, 1982; Hymes, 1982); and case studies (Bissex, 1996; 1980; Bissex & Bullock, 1987). Such research is based on close observation, detailed descriptions, and interpretations grounded in theoretical and research frameworks of language and culture, oral and written discourse, and the processes of learning and teaching.

Teacher research is a genre within this larger, primarily qualitative, paradigm that links reflection, inquiry and action, with the potential to improve practice (Patterson & Shannon, 1993). Indeed, Erickson (1988) argued that teachers must assume the professional responsibility of "investigating their own practices systematically and critically, by methods that are appropriate to their practice" (p. 157). Pine (1992)
discussed three theoretical models for teacher research, and clarified where teacher research fits in a continuum of theory, research and practice. He stated that teacher research is located

> somewhere between "big-R" university research on the one hand, and teachers' daily intuition on the other. Teacher research is not big-R research, which is often carried out by people who will not be directly affected by it, nor is it at the other end of the spectrum, the classroom teacher's minute-by-minute intuitive decision making. Rather, teacher research is 'systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work' (p. 657).

Fleischer (1995) traced the theoretical development of the construct of teacher research and its relationship to other disciplines such as feminist research and phenomenological description, which, Fleischer explained. . . "helps the teacher come closer to analyzing and then understanding the world of the student, which in turn results in practical action, the teacher striving to make the world of the schools better for them both" (p.39). According to Fleischer, it is the transaction between this thick description and the practical action that results in improved pedagogy. Those written accounts become representative of an array of classroom contexts and teachers' and students' experiences in them. As other teacher researchers reflect on these accounts, new and deeper understandings of their own and others' classrooms are created. The resulting discourse among teacher researchers can effect change and contribute to the knowledge of the teaching and learning enterprise. Thus, teacher research gives teachers voice in the

scholarship arena and the right to be scholars on their own terms (Patterson, Santa, Short, & Smith, 1993).

The vision of how teacher research could be an integral part of a master's degree, as well as teachers' stated needs and preferences in selecting a program, guided the revision and development of the program described below.

Reconsidering the Elementary Masters Program

The initial problem confronting the elementary education faculty was low enrollment in the master's programs regardless of the various specializations; i.e., reading, technology, or general curriculum that students could take. Class sizes were small and hard to justify for the amount of student hours generated. In the spring of 1994, all of the elementary master of education programs were placed on moratorium at the initiation of the department, the college dean, and the graduate dean and council. This situation provided the elementary education faculty the opportunity to review the existing programs, research the potential graduate student pool in our area, and revamp the programs to better serve the students' stated needs and requirements.

From fall 1994 to winter 1995, three information sharing meetings were held with teachers and administrators from the area public school districts. The purpose of these meetings was to gather information about teachers' selection of and responses to the various masters of education degree programs offered in the area. The evidence indicated that teachers in the districts within a 100 mile radius of the university were choosing market-oriented, private colleges who offered out-reach master's programs. One administrator at the initial meeting reported that among her faculty six new master's degrees were completed through a private institution, which offered its program at her school site. Another said that twelve master's degrees came from a different private college, which also brought its program into a district and delivered it at a local school once a critical mass of students enrolled. They identified specific program elements--primarily having to do with format and delivery--preferred by educators seeking advanced degrees. These program elements included a weekend delivery format, a cohort model, the ability to work collaboratively with colleagues across schools and levels,

facilitative rather than directive roles of faculty, diversity of presenters and delivery styles, and credit for previous master's level work.

We considered these points in revising our master of education degree program. Our challenge was to provide a master of education program that would meet the desired format and delivery needs of practicing teachers, and provide the rigor, intellectual stimulation and challenge that is necessary for the professional development and growth of educators. We approached that challenge in the following manner.

Program Development

After the initial information meetings, we formed a steering committee that included public school teachers, administrators and college faculty to consult with us and provide input on the program design. We identified literacy teaching and learning as the focus for the program, since the majority of the elementary faculty had expertise and training in this area. Literacy is a critical overarching concept in schooling. We adopted a cohort model of up to 25 students who would complete the courses and the program over a specified length of time together. The program spanned six consecutive quarters, with a winter quarter start-up, and one full-time summer intensive course of study. We adopted a weekend format for course delivery during the academic year quarters (two weekends a month, Friday night from 5:00-9:00 and Saturday from 8:00-5:00). The summer quarter was full-time during the six-week regular summer session.

Our goals for candidates in the program were that they would learn to develop literacy-based curriculums, understand and apply current literacy assessment and evaluation techniques, design and implement teacher research literacy projects, and understand the social, psychological and philosophical theories related to literacy and child development. To date, two cohorts have completed the entire cycle, one in June 1997 and a second one in June 1998. A third cohort will finish in June 1999. The fourth cohort of nineteen students began this January 1999. The following section details the course content and sequence that the cohorts follow, with minor variations, as they progress through the program.

Program Design

The literacy concentration draws upon the Woodring College of Education's faculty expertise in language and literacy development, children's and young adult literature, curriculum development, and multicultural education. Students in the program learn to implement innovative literacy assessment and evaluation techniques, and develop superior literacy-based curricula. They design, implement, and evaluate research-based literacy projects in their schools and classrooms, and understand the social, psychological, and philosophical theories related to literacy and child development.

The first two quarters of the program, winter and spring, provide the background and preparation for the students to begin identifying the questions they have about literacy teaching and learning in their classrooms. The first quarter consists of two four credit courses, one in curriculum development (ELED 521 Seminar in Elementary Curriculum) and one in children's literature (ELED 583 Literacy and Children's Literature). These courses introduce students to graduate study and to issues in literacy education. In these courses the students study curriculum design and the use of multicultural and multiethnic literature in literacy events in their classrooms. Through readings, discussion, cooperative activities, and various in-depth projects, students gain skills in understanding theoretical and practical aspects of curriculum development and design. They also learn about research in the teaching of literature and response to literature, and build their repertoires and knowledge of literary genres and literary criticism.

The spring quarter consists of a course in research design and methodology (EDU 501 Introduction to Educational Research). Here the students learn primarily about the quantitative research paradigm and read studies based in the reading research literature. The other course is language arts research and issues for classroom practice (ELED 584 Teaching the Integrated Language Arts). In this course they are introduced to the construct of teacher research, and carry out a small-scale teacher research project in their classrooms. This project generally emerges from the students' individual interests in a specific aspect of literacy as it applies to their classroom practices.

In the summer session, the students take a 12-credit load during the regular six-week summer session. The courses, each four credits, build on the previous work and provide the basis for their teacher research field projects. In a second research and proposal development course (ELED 535 Research Analysis of Current Issues in Elementary Education), the students identify specific areas of inquiry with regard to literacy and learn more about the qualitative research paradigm. They complete an in-depth review of the literature on their topic of inquiry, and develop a research proposal for a field project. This course is accompanied by two other classes, (ELED 589 Language Acquisition and Literacy Development), and literacy assessment and evaluation (ELED 597 Current Issues in Assessment and Evaluation in Elementary Literacy Education). The students can draw on components from each of these classes, as well as their previous courses, for reviewing the research literature, and for identifying research designs and methods. When they leave at the end of this intensive summer, the students have a plan for their field project, which is carried out over the next three quarters of the program. Typically, they begin their research in October after adjustments and modifications have been made in light of their new students and classroom contexts.

In the fall and winter of the second year, quarters four and five, the students work on their projects in a course that spans both quarters and is offered for two credits per quarter (ELED 596b Advanced Practicum in Teaching: Elementary School). In the fall, the students implement their field project, begin their data collection and continue to read and review research as it applies to their own project. They meet as a whole group during scheduled weekend class time to discuss issues that arise, and data collection and management techniques. They also report to small teacher research support groups about their progress--to share the challenges and successes they encounter in conducting their research. In the second quarter, they continue to collect data, and begin data analysis.

During the scheduled weekend class time, they meet for individual conferences with the instructor who follows the sequence through from fall to winter. The other courses students take during the fall and winter quarters are four credit core courses based in the educational foundations program area. These are the philosophical, psychological, and sociological

foundations of education classes (EDF 512 Seminar in Educational Philosophy and EDF 513 Seminar in Psychology and Sociology of Education) also designed with a literacy focus. In traditional programs, these are often offered early in the program; however, input from the steering committee influenced the placement of these courses. The committee suggested that these courses come later in the sequence, the rationale being that they could help students clarify broader issues within their own research. When they begin these courses, the students often comment that they would like to have them earlier in the sequence, but later state how helpful they are in light of interpreting the findings from their research. It is not unusual to see the influence of the readings and discussions from these courses integrated into the final drafts of their field projects at the end of the program.

The concluding spring quarter is devoted to the final write up of the their research project (ELED 539 Masters Seminar) and to developing a leadership/dissemination project based on their original research (ELED 592e Field Experience in Elementary School Leadership). These projects are designed with a specific audience and action in mind. They take a variety of forms, and are based on the students' interests and their professional contexts. Examples of the leadership and dissemination projects include inservice programs for building and district teachers, web sites for parents and students, conference proposals and presentations, articles submitted for publication, and curricular and program brochures for parent education. Along with the links to classroom practice that are forged throughout the program, these dissemination projects demonstrate the value and purpose of the teachers' research to their colleagues, administrators, and the children and parents with whom they work.

The Links between Teacher Research and Classroom Practices

The Master of Education with a Concentration in Literacy program emphasizes the development of professionals who are teacher-researchers and who create their own knowledge and understanding of classroom practice. The theory and practice of research is threaded throughout the course work from the moment the teachers begin the master's sequence. For example, in the course on children's literature, one assignment focuses on how to take and use field notes and transcribe video or audio taped teaching interactions of a read aloud or guided

reading with a trade book. That assignment is carried through to the course in language arts the following quarter, where the teachers learn how to analyze and code their transcribed interactions. The purpose of such assignments is to help the teachers develop deeper understandings about their roles--researcher, curriculum designer, and educator--in literacy teaching and learning. They "build theory concerning the particulars of their circumstances through reflection, inquiry, and action; they perform the role of curriculum designer based on their research (perhaps consulting with other teachers and students); and they adjust their practice based on their conclusions from the study" (Patterson & Shannon, p. 10, 1993).

Research and Dissemination Projects

While literacy is the overarching concept for deepening the skills of inquiry, reflection and action in the classroom, the topics the teachers explore are varied and unique to the needs, interests and contexts of each individual. Over the past two years, the majority of settings for teacher research occurred in K-8 classrooms. Two studies, however, took place in a federal Job Corps program with English as Second Language young adult learners. Another project occurred in a center for adjudicated youth, while others took place after school, on our college campus, or in private homes. The research topics ranged from a focus on the oral mathematical reasoning of primary students, to an investigation of a reading and writing assessment continuum for a K-6 school, to an analysis of the written and oral discourse of juvenile delinquents. All of the research projects had strong instructional components. The teachers wanted to develop their skills so they could enhance their students' learning (Mohr, 1996; Patterson & Shannon, 1993).

When we analyzed the 19 teacher research topics of our second cohort (see Table 2, page 16), five general areas of focus emerged. These included oral discourse, written discourse, writing process, assessment and evaluation design, and curriculum design. A research project was categorized in oral discourse if the teacher videotaped or audio taped and analyzed some aspect of teacher-student or student-student dialogue. The written discourse category described projects in which the teacher engaged in written dialogue with students. Writing process projects focused on analysis of writing samples collected from students. Assessment and evaluation

projects either demonstrated the development of a new assessment strategy or applied existing assessments to analyze student learning. The projects categorized as curriculum design focused on how teachers redesigned aspects of the teaching day, such as creating a block of uninterrupted time for literacy instruction and learning, and analyzed the patterns of literacy development that emerged.

Some of the projects fell into more than one category. For example, one teacher looked at the nature of performance assessment and written responses from her third grade students. As part of her field project, she developed a scoring guide for the students' written responses to literature. She analyzed the student responses in light of the quality of the written discourse, and progressively redesigned her scoring guide. Her project fit in both the assessment and evaluation and written discourse
categories.

The projects reflected the current trend in literacy programs to focus on the processes of learning (Fisher, Fox, & Paille, 1996). They also reflected the deeper understandings the teachers developed about the literacy learning and teaching cycle and the role that their own research played in the cycle. In response to a survey about the content and processes of their teacher research projects, one student wrote, "I have come to realize that quantitative research cannot pick up the nuances that are part of every classroom." Another commented that her research "has reinforced that time is a very important key in the learning process, not only the time spent on skills and teaching but also the time a child needs for development."

In addition to deepening the teachers' knowledge and awareness of the processes of learning, the projects supported the participants' professional development. One teacher responded that "This research has helped me to clarify many parts of my teaching of literacy . . .It has helped me grow as a teacher. I have learned to be observant, to listen carefully and thoughtfully." The research has also supported and provided evidence for what teachers intuitively think about learning. One teacher stated that her research was a "confirmation of intuitive understanding that language is a vital part of classroom practice." Commenting on why

she conducted her research project, another teacher stated, "I did it because I am a life-long learner, and I think research in teaching done by teachers themselves is another way we can help understand children and can improve teaching and learning." The comments illustrate that sometimes what is new for the teachers is not necessarily an innovation they have developed or discovered. As Mohr (1996) states, "Because teacher research is a way of teaching as well as a way of gathering information, it is not tied to what is new. Teacher researchers value the work of other researchers and respect the requirements of their school system, but their work is internally motivated, based on their day-to-day interactions with students" (p. 118). Tables 1, 2 and 3 document specific teacher research and dissemination topics from past and current cohorts.

Table 1

Cohort One Research and Dissemination Projects

Student	Research Project	Dissemination Project
C. Allred	An Open Invitation to Writing Workshop: What Happens to Middle School Writing Attitudes?	Inservice for Middle School teaching staff
A. Austin	Enhancing Literacy Through Cross-Age Tutoring	"How To" Manual Implementing Cross-Age Tutoring
R. Butterworth	Improving Literacy Curriculum and Instruction with ESL Young Adults at Job Corps	Regional Staff Inservice National Conference
K. Cleary	Implementing a Research Based Spelling Program into the Writing Workshop	"How To" article submitted for publication
S. Ellens	Literacy Acquisition of ESL Students: A Case Study	Workshop outlining case study and support methods
E. Hamming	Resilient Students in School: A Review of Literature and Case Studies	Internet site
E. Hovde	Teaching the Language of Mathematics Using Journal Writing and Cooperative Groups	Article for publication
S. Hubbard	The Writing Process and its Relationship to Oral Language Development for Four Second Grade Students	Inside the Writing Process -- article for publication
V. Hubner	Best Practices in Family Literacy and Program Evaluation	Nooksack Valley Even Start Family Literacy Program: Program Evaluation Guideline
C. Kloes	The Relationship of Phonemic Awareness, Children's Literature, and Emergent Reading and Writing	K/1 School and Home Reading Program
B. Sipsey	Extending Young Children's Writing Through Writers' Workshop	Inservice for school staff on Writers' Workshop
J. Soiseth-Farmer	Symbolic Play and The Literacy Connection: An Examination of Emergent Readers	Article submitted for publication
L. Sytsma	Making Literature Come Alive: Let Them Talk	Inservice on Literature Circles
D. Thayer	The Use of Symbolic Play as a Learning Medium for Literacy Development in a First Grade Classroom	Training Video
J. Webster	Exploring Adult ESOL Learning Strategies Through Literature Study Groups	ESOL Application National Conference and Presentation to EdCI 394B at WWU
S. Wild	Mini-Lessons, Shared Literature, Oral Language and the Development of Early Writing Skills	Seminar for teachers --Developing Writers in the Primary Classroom K-2

Table 2

Cohort Two Research and Dissemination Projects

Student	Research Project	Dissemination Project
L. Coonrod	Oral Discourse in Rural Cohort Schools	Web Site
K. Dominguez	If Literacy Doesn't Interest Them, Try the Blocks	Presentation at NW Regional Early Literacy and Reading Recovery Conference
L. England	Developmentally Appropriate Reading Strategies to Help Children Progress: Investigating the First Steps Program	Web Site
J. Filer	Phonemic Awareness: Exploring Sounds and Discovering Connections for the Song of Literacy in Three Measures: Reading, Spelling and Writing	District Inservice
K. Grady	Social Writing: A Learning Process for Teacher and Students	Presentation at NW Regional Early Literacy and Reading Recovery Conference
K. Henderson	Adolescent Academic Reading Conversations: Talk, Meaning, and Construction	In-Service Workshop Plan
K. Hope	Early Intervention for At-Risk First-Grade Readers	In-Service Workshop Plan
M. Joyce Blue	Word Processing and the Writing Process of Junior High School Students	Inservice Plan
M. Kemp	A Legion or a Community of Learners?	Brochure displaying different program cohort structures in Woodring College of Education
S. Langerveld	The Love of Communication: Becoming a Confident and Competent First Grade Reader and Writer	Received grant for improving classroom practice in writing (Gr. 1)
I. Loveluck	The Development of Oral Mathematical Discourse: An Observational Multiage Classroom Study	Web Site Teacher Materials
P. McGrath	When a Book Comes to Life: The Use of Interactive Pocket Books in the Kindergarten Classroom	Teaching Materials - Using Pocket Books in the Early Childhood Classroom and Presentation at NW Regional Early Literacy and Reading Recovery Conference
P. McKellar	Transactions with Literature: The Nature of Performance Assessment and Written Response in Reading	Workshop Plan
R. Meintel	Methods for Promoting and Supporting Oral Discourse	Early Childhood Education Northwest - agency wide education sharing and parent information sheets
J. Pless-Dalrymple	An Analysis of Discourse Interactions among Adjudicated Adolescents	Article Printed in Bellingham Herald
J. Sealy	Heterogeneous Grouping in an Elementary Classroom: A Case Study	Web Site
T. Shikany	Oral Language Development: A Single-Subject Case Study	Developed Parent Materials and Distributed to Obstetrician Offices
B. Trenary	Repeated Reading and Semantic Mapping as Reading Improvement Strategies in an Intermediate Grade Classroom	A Guide to Aid Instructional Assistants in Helping Students Improve Reading Fluency and Comprehension
P. Ward	Dialogue Journals: Motivation Through Participation	Teaching Materials

Table 3

Cohort Three Research and Dissemination Projects

Student	Research Projects Still in Progress	Dissemination Projects
L. Boze	Transactive Criticism: Helping Children Respond to Literature	To be completed June 1999
M. Capper	The Effects of Story Starters on Draft Book Writing for First Graders	To be completed June 1999
J. Carlson	Cooperative Reading and Writing and its Effects on Reading Fluency and Attitudes	To be completed June 1999
M. Cunningham	Matching Spelling Strategies Using Self-Assessment	To be completed June 1999
L. Enell	Cross-Age Tutoring and Reading Instruction	To be completed June 1999
K. Fischer	5th Grade Voluntary Peer Paired Reading Program	To be completed June 1999
D. Grisham	Improving Reading Fluency Using Self-Evaluation	To be completed June 1999
T. Larsen-Gray	Comparing the Writing Process using Pencil and Paper and Computer Word Processing	To be completed June 1999
P. Hall	Participant Interaction and Writing Development in a Desktop Video-conferencing Environment	To be completed June 1999
L. Lavine	Using Picture Books to Teach 5th Graders about the Concept of War	To be completed June 1999
C. Mattson	How Does "Success for All" Increase Comprehension for Middle Grade ESL Students?	To be completed June 1999
B. McCallum	Multiage Classrooms and the Acquisition of Reading and Writing	To be completed June 1999
M. Nikula	Writing and Problem Solving in Math	To be completed June 1999
J. Ormsby	Can Computer Assisted Instruction Improve Fluency and Comprehension?	To be completed June 1999
T. Smith	How Do Reading Toolkit Activities Help Special Education Students in Taking the WASL?	To be completed June 1999
K. Sutherland	Self-Assessment and Reluctant Writers	To be completed June 1999
C. Waldron	Dialogue Journals and Reading Comprehension	To be completed June 1999

The above tables demonstrate that although teachers' research projects focused on a variety of literacy topics, all could be categorized in terms of learning processes. While the teacher research project is a central component of the program, other elements contribute to the generally positive responses we have had from both the students and the faculty who participate in the program and are documented on the following pages.

Student Survey Results

Mid-program Evaluations

The first year, nineteen students were accepted into the Masters in Education Program with a Concentration in Literacy. Since the end of the summer quarter is the program's midpoint, the students were surveyed using an open-ended questionnaire regarding the strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for improvement of the program format, course sequence, and course content (see Appendix A). The mid-program review results shown in Table 4 indicated that the students were generally satisfied with the program, but also, as with any new program, had suggestions for improvement.

Table 4

First Cohort Mid-Program Evaluation

August 1996 Open-ended Survey* N = 9	
Program Format:	
Strengths	
Can teach & work on degree	78%
Students bonded during summer	34%
Weaknesses	
Heavy workload in summer	67%
Long time between classes (Winter & Spring quarters with each class meeting only once per month)	67%
Suggestions for Improvement	
1. Offer both classes each weekend to avoid the long time between them	22%
2. Use study groups or some class time for group meeting time	33%
Course Sequence & Content:	
Strengths	
Logical, well-planned sequence	89%
Challenging, relevant readings	67%
Literacy courses are excellent	34%
Weaknesses	
Assessment course irrelevant	67%
Curriculum course at undergraduate level	34%
Suggestions for Improvement (each mentioned once)	
1. Changes in course sequence	
2. Need qualitative research information	
3. Need technology class	
4. Discussions dominated by a few students	
***Note: Totals may not add up to 100% because of multiple opportunities to respond to open-ended questions.**	

As a result of the first cohort evaluation, the summer session was changed to a six week session, allowing the students time to prepare for the start of their public school year. Instructors for both the assessment course and the curriculum course were changed and positive results have been noted. Concerted efforts were made to increase the number of completed surveys to gather more accurate data. The results of the second and third cohort mid-program surveys are shown in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5

Second Cohort Mid-Program Evaluation

August 1997 Open-ended Survey* N = 17	
Program Format:	
Strengths	
Can teach & work on degree	88%
Time to work on assignments	41%
Students bonded during summer	35%
Major research writing in summer	35%
Six week summer session (not 9 wk)	29%
Weaknesses	
Heavy workload in summer	30%
Campus shut down on weekends	12%
Huge impact if miss one class	12%
Suggestions for Improvement	
1. Clear expectations for summer classes	24%
2. Have EDU 501 Introduction to Educational Research & ELED 597 Current Issues in Assessment and Evaluation in Elementary Literacy Education classes in same quarter	18%
3. Have syllabi & texts available early	12%
Course Sequence & Content:	
Strengths	
Thought provoking assignments	82%
Logical, well-planned sequence	59%
The professors	47%
Weaknesses	
Intense summer session	59%
Assessment course placement	53%
Delivery of the 501 class	12%
Miscommunication between professors	12%
Suggestions for Improvement	
1. Add qualitative information to the EDU 501 Introduction to Educational Research quantitative course	59%
2. Come to summer session with project idea	18%
3. Sequence -- EDU 501 Introduction to Educational Research & ELED 597 Assessment classes in same quarter	12%
*Note: Totals may not add up to 100% because of multiple opportunities to respond to open-ended questions.	

In response to these program evaluations, the class sequence on the weekends was changed so that less time elapsed between classes and students see both professors each weekend. Effort has also been made to increase the communication between professors. This has helped the continuity of the program considerably.

Information from these student evaluations has been shared with professors from the program. Each professor has responded in his/her own way to grouping students during projects.

allowing class time for group work, and maintaining the balance of student response in the cohort. Professors' advance visits with students have provided introductions to courses, and many of the required readings for classes and syllabi have been made available earlier.

Table 6

Third Cohort Mid-Program Evaluation

August 1998 N = 13	
Program Format:	
Strengths	
Can teach & work on degree	100%
Intense summer, but worth it	69%
Weakness	
Avoid two weekends in a row	38%
Suggestions for Improvement	
1. Have assessment class on separate day (in summer session)	77%
2. Adjust class times (8am Saturday & 5pm Friday is too early, and end earlier on Friday)	23%
Course Sequence & Content:	
Strengths	
Challenging, enjoyable classes	77%
Logical, well-planned sequence	54%
Weakness	
Intense spring session (overload)	23%
Suggestions for Improvement	
1. The EDU 501 Introduction to Educational Research class should be earlier in the program, possibly the first quarter, and have a study guide	100%
2. Improve & reevaluate the assessment class	23%

*Note: Totals may not add up to 100% because of multiple opportunities to respond to open-ended questions.

Final Program Evaluations

At the end of the program, students are again surveyed using an open-ended questionnaire (see Appendix B). At this time, students are asked about personal and professional benefits of the program, suggestions to improve the program, and reasons they might recommend the program to others. Timing and miscommunication resulted in receiving only four responses from the first cohort at the end of the program. Although few in number, these surveys contain valuable information and can be viewed in Table 7.

Table 7

First Cohort Final Program Evaluation

June 1997 Open-ended Survey* N = 4	
Benefits of the Program:	
Confidence to challenge existing systems	100%
Support for what I do in my classroom	75%
Self-confidence	75%
New visions of education	50%
Cohort friends/colleagues	50%
Suggestions to Improve the Program:	
Explore research topics earlier & share	75%
Higher standards for participation	25%
Draft males into the program	25%
Revise summer schedule	25%
I would recommend the program because of:	
Content	75%
Professors value students	75%
Time frame	50%
Professional growth & challenge	50%

*Note: Totals may not add up to 100% because of multiple opportunities to respond to open-ended questions.

The final program evaluation survey was redesigned for the second cohort (see Appendix C). It not only included questions about program format and course content and sequences, but added questions about the teacher research project, professional and personal development. The results of this survey are in Table 8.

Table 8

Second Cohort Final Program Evaluation

Second Cohort -- Mid-Program Evaluation
August 1997
Open-ended Survey*
N = 17

Program Format:	
Strengths	
Can teach & work on degree	88%
Time to work on assignments	41%
Students bonded during summer	35%
Major research writing in summer	35%
Six week summer session (not 9 wk)	29%
Weaknesses	
Heavy workload in summer	30%
Campus shut down on weekends	12%
Huge impact if miss one class	12%
Suggestions for Improvement	
1. Clear expectations for summer classes	24%
2. Have EDU 501 Introduction to Educational Research & ELED 597 Current Issues in Assessment and Evaluation in Elementary Literacy Education classes in same quarter	18%
3. Have syllabi & texts available early	12%
Course Sequence & Content:	
Strengths	
Thought provoking assignments	82%
Logical, well-planned sequence	59%
The professors	47%
Weaknesses	
Intense summer session	59%
Assessment course placement	53%
Delivery of the 501 class	12%
Miscommunication between professors	12%
Suggestions for Improvement	
1. Add qualitative information to the EDU 501 Introduction to Educational Research quantitative course	59%
2. Come to summer session with project idea	18%
3. Sequence -- EDU 501 Introduction to Educational Research & ELED 597 Current Issues in Assessment and Evaluation in Elementary Literacy Education classes in same quarter	12%

***Note: Totals may not add up to 100% because of multiple opportunities to respond to open-ended questions.**

An email survey (see Appendix C) was completed by the second cohort asking for information about the culminating project, characteristics of the research paradigm used, why the research project was chosen, professional development and implications for education from the project. Their responses are summarized in Table 9 below.

Table 9

Second Cohort End of Research Project

Open-ended Email Survey* May 1998 N = 9	
Description of Culminating Projects:	
Design materials for teachers	33%
Inservice for teachers	22%
Design web page	22%
Write a grant	11%
Write article for publication	11%
Research Paradigm Used in Research Project:	
Qualitative	100%
Qualitative with Quantitative Support	22%
Quantitative	0%
Why Project Was Chosen:	
Teacher Interest	89%
Learn about Learning	22%
Effect of Research on Classroom Practice and Professional Development:	
Incorporate results in classroom	56%
Teacher Research is important	44%
Growth as a Teacher	44%
Implications of Research for Education:	
Classroom Use	100%
Add to Body of Research	22%

*Note: Totals may not add up to 100% because of multiple opportunities to respond.

Program Completion Rate

For all programs, it is important to track students during the program and after the conclusion of the program. As the table below demonstrates, this program has a high completion rate. Occasionally, a small number of students left the program for personal reasons but rejoined and completed the program with a later cohort. One factor in establishing such a high rate may be the cohort model, which encourages students to develop both professional and personal relationships throughout the program and beyond. The completion rate of the first two cohorts and that projected for the third cohort are in Table 10.

Table 10

Program Completion Rate

Cohort Number	Starting Number	Completion Number	Continuation Number	Completion Rate
1	19	15	1	78.9%
2	21	18	3	85.7%
3	17	NA	1	Graduation June 1999

Strengths of the Program Structure and Format

Students' written answers to a series of questions about the structure and format of the program highlighted several strengths in the overall program design. First, the students respond positively to the weekend format, stating that they are able to find a balance between their work, family obligations, and academic demands. They see connections between the theories, research and classroom practices they are learning about and their own work in classrooms and educational settings. Many students comment on the cohesiveness of the course sequence and delivery. In addition, the students state their appreciation of the personal attention they and their work receives, and the responsiveness of faculty who teach in the program. These strengths may well contribute to the overall high completion rate of this master's program.

The students also like the cohort model. Many note that they make close professional and personal bonds as they progress through the program. Often, they contrast this educational experience with those in which they have not known the other participants. For most, the cohort structure has provided opportunities to form study groups and other support structures they have found helpful.

Challenges of the Program Structure and Format

The students' program evaluations and statements from participating faculty reveal the challenges of the program structure and format. Some of these can be attributed to incorporating an alternative design into a traditional institutional structure. For example, access to the library and other administrative offices is difficult for students who come to campus only on weekends.

Initially, students find it challenging to do the research required of them due to the limited hours the library is open when they are not in class. Many of the students commute up to 100 miles for the Friday evening and all day Saturday classes. Since the summer courses are offered during the regular session and students are on campus during the day, library access is less problematic. We encourage and facilitate the use of technology to address this challenge. As our library technology increases and students can access the collections through the Internet and programs like PQD, from which they can download articles to their own computers, this should become less problematic as well.

For faculty, both the cohort model and the weekend format require a different kind of mind-set and workload. Some of the adjustments that faculty make include working alone on the weekends, planning for 13 hours of concentrated contact with students twice a month, providing for continuity and cohesiveness among other classes and faculty, and sustaining energy levels. To adapt for these challenges, the faculty maintain contact with the students between classes during the academic year through memos, e-mail, telephone conferences and classroom visits. The summer session allows for daily contact and frequent advising on campus.

To provide continuity between classes, the faculty members communicate about the cohort through writing and meetings. They have the students complete exit cards after each class as a way to communicate their thoughts. These cards are passed to the other teaching faculty in that quarter so questions or concerns can be responded to promptly. Major projects are also carried from one class to another to maintain connections. Occasionally, faculty members visit one another's classes for special presentations by the students, or to provide introductory readings and assignments for the next quarter's classes so students can prepare for the first class sessions in advance.

The faculty members who teach the two-quarter, teacher-research field project sequence, and the final two courses in which the students write up their research and work on their dissemination projects, have exceptionally heavy reading and responding loads. We have tried to distribute the advising responsibilities for these papers among the faculty in elementary education; however, our first attempt at this, with students in the second cohort, was not as

successful as we had hoped. Many of the faculty who volunteered to serve in this capacity do not teach in the program, but expressed interest in working with students whose projects related to their own fields of interest, such as early childhood or classroom discourse structures. Again, time and logistics (matching schedules and students being able to meet with their assigned advisor when they were on campus) proved difficult to overcome. Although the students wanted the additional feedback on their projects, the general consensus among the group was that it was difficult to establish a relationship with a new faculty member at that point in the program. We plan to establish more explicit procedures for facilitating this process with subsequent cohorts. Here again, technology can prove useful for establishing and maintaining consistent communication between faculty and students.

This program requires considerable time, effort and commitment on the students' parts for the six quarters they are in the program. Due to the fixed sequence of courses which are offered once a year, there is little room for rotating in and out of the program or opting to take fewer classes than are set for any given quarter. There have been students, however, who needed to withdraw from the course sequence for personal reasons. Two of these cycled back in to the program with the following cohort and were able to finish. In all, the students have five years, from date of entry, to complete their graduate program.

While the cohort model is generally considered a strength of the program, it also presents certain challenges. At times, the cohort takes on what the faculty call "a life of its own." For example, one member may speak out in class or call an instructor with a question, comment, or suggestion and claim to speak for the whole group. We have learned to check other members' perspectives on issues that affect the group at large, and to encourage individuals to speak for themselves. In addition, some faculty have found it daunting to be "newcomers" to the cohort after relationships and modes of interacting have been established in early courses. Most concerns on the students' parts arise from perceptions that they are not being treated as professionals. When this is the case, the group can present a solidarity that is reflected in the individual faculty member's course evaluations and even the program evaluations. We have addressed this challenge by acknowledging and treating the differences in faculty members'

teaching styles, their perspectives with regard to literacy and research paradigms, and approaches to advising and grading as a natural and desirable part of graduate study. New faculty are oriented to the program and introduced ahead of time to the cohort. The faculty who teach in the program are aware of the importance of maintaining and communicating respect for one another and for the varying viewpoints they represent.

The final challenge relates to social and gender issues. Overall, the preservice and graduate programs in the elementary education department lack ethnic and gender diversity in both the faculty and the student body. This is particularly evident in the master's program. Thus far, all but one of the students have been Caucasian women. In our own pool of eight elementary faculty, there are no people of color. Despite the fact that half of the elementary faculty eligible to teach in the program are men and two have taught consistently in the program, it is the elementary women faculty and women from other departments; i.e., educational foundations and secondary education, who teach the bulk of the courses. Some of these same women faculty teach two to three of the classes in the master's program. Although this aspect provides for a certain kind of continuity for the program and students, there is a trade-off in lack of exposure to a variety of faculty and perspectives. Recently, the college has renewed its efforts to recruit and retain ethnic faculty and students. We are also encouraging faculty who have not yet taught in the program to do so.

Future Considerations for the Program

While we have conducted an on-going and internal evaluation of the Masters program and used this data to make productive changes to the content, format and delivery of this experience, a worthwhile additions is an external evaluation of the program from professors in other departments and venues. An external evaluation will provide perspectives from those not so closely involved with the program and offer a chance to challenge or triangulate findings. External evaluations often provide ways of helping other members of the institution understand more about what other branches of the college have to offer.

The mid-term and final evaluations have been conducted through the use of open-ended questions on an anonymous survey. We plan to redesign our survey to include quantitative as well as qualitative measures.

Conclusion

We have addressed the substantive points of the program focus, structure and format, and considered the place of teacher research as it fits in this program. The Master of Education with a Concentration in Literacy program builds on the strengths of our existing elementary education faculty, the current resources available at the university and in the surrounding educational community. A variety of evidence shows that we have met or exceeded the goals of providing a high quality and consistent program that both meets the needs of our students and fits into the existing graduate school structure.

Already many of the graduates from the first cohort have been guest speakers in subsequent master's classes and in preservice teacher education classes where they share their literacy research and classroom practices. Two graduates have been hired as adjuncts in our department to teach undergraduate teacher education literacy courses, and one has been accepted into a highly regarded doctoral program and awarded a teaching fellowship. Evidence from the program evaluations and the quality of the teacher research projects indicates that we have structured an environment and content that not only fosters the development of a master teacher but a master learner as well.

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Appendix A: M.Ed. Concentration in Literacy Final Mid-program Evaluation

(Note: space to write is reduced in this form)

Please reply to these prompts as fully as you can. If you need more room, attach additional pages or write on the back.

Program Format:

1. The strengths of the weekend format during the academic year are…
2. The weaknesses of the weekend format during the academic year are …
3. My suggestions for improving the format are…
4. The strengths of the summer full-time format are…
5. The weaknesses of the summer full-time format are…
6. My suggestions for improving the format are…

Course Sequence

1. The strengths of the course sequence thus far are…
2. The weaknesses of the course sequence thus far are…
3. My suggestions for improvement are…

Course Content

1. The strengths of the course content thus far are…
2. The weaknesses of the course content thus far are…
3. My suggestions for improvement are…

Name (optional)_____

Appendix B: M.Ed. Concentration in Literacy Final Program Evaluation

(Note: space to write is reduced in this form)

Please respond to the questions below. If you need more room, attach additional pages or write on the back.

1. In what ways did your participation in the M. Ed. Concentration in Literacy program benefit you?

2. What suggestions do you have for strengthening the M. Ed. Concentration in Literacy program?

3. Would you recommend the M. Ed. Concentration in Literacy program to colleagues? Why or why not?

Appendix C: M.Ed. Concentration in Literacy Final Program Evaluation Redesigned

(Note: space to write is reduced in this form)

Please respond to the questions below. If you need more room, attach additional pages or write on the back.

Program Structure, Course Content and Format

1. What kinds of projects and assignments were most beneficial or had the most impact on your learning and teaching?

2. What suggestions do you have for strengthening the M. Ed. Concentration in Literacy program (e.g., course content, course sequence, delivery format)?

Research Emphasis

1. How has your teacher research project impacted your classroom practice?

2. What needs to be in place for you to continue research projects in your classroom?

Professional Development

1. What professional work (e.g., committees, new professional responsibilities, inservice or staff development) related to the literacy concentration have you participated in during or since your program?

2. Where do you see yourself professionally in five years?

Personal

1. In what ways did your participation in the program benefit you?

2. Would you recommend the program to colleagues? Why or why not?

3. Now that you have completed the program, what are your reflect ions on the program structure, the time commitment, and your professional development?

Name (optional)_____

Appendix D: M.Ed. Concentration in Literacy E-mail Research Survey

Please respond to these questions as fully and completely as you can. Thanks for your time and effort.

1. Briefly describe your culminating research project.
2. Define the research paradigm used in your project (e.g., what are the primary characteristics of the research you conducted?).
3. If someone asked why you did this project, what would you tell him/her?
4. How has conducting this research affected your classroom practice and your professional development?
5. What implications does your research have for education?